

## WHAT IS OUR IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY?<sup>1</sup>

**T**WO Gulfs have attracted the attention of the world since the pioneering days of North America. They are both the outlet of two mighty streams and, at the same time, the entrance to the hinterland of an immense continent. The Gulf of Mexico is northerly bordered by five of the largest states of this republic; the Gulf of St. Lawrence expands its green and icy waters between Newfoundland, the Province of Quebec, and the three Maritime Provinces of the Realm of Canada.

Quebec and the Gulf of Mexico, despite a distance of two thousand miles separating them, have had much to do with one another in the early days. It is quite impossible for a Quebecer, for a Montrealer in particular, not to recall the deeds of the two LeMoynes, founders of Mobile and New Orleans; above all, not to ponder over the heroic travels and death of Cavalier de La Salle in the wilds of Texas. This tragic end of a wonderful enterprise did not, however, discourage Canadians from attempting again to reach your Imperial State. Your Canadian River appears to have been so called after one of them and we know that your neighboring city of Galveston was founded on the land of Michel Ménard, a native of St. Denis-sur-Richelieu, near Montreal. It also appears that in 1845, when the United States of

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America thought of annexing Texas, they thought of annexing Canada too. And now, "si parva licet componere magnis," my presence here, in answer to your kind invitation, is to me like a new link between my beloved Province and your Powerful State.

Is it not characteristic of our times that this event should take place under the patronage of university training, and is it not a new proof that the world of intelligence and learning is truly international? I foster a great hope that, in the future, the universities shall work steadily together in a sense of mutual understanding between nations, and do their share in the maintenance of peace.

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Now, to deal with the subject of this paper, let me first tell you how I have been induced to choose it. We have, in Montreal, a sister university, well-known to you, I believe: I name "Old McGill." The Principal of McGill is an Arizona boy of Canadian descent, Mr. Lewis-William Douglas. Being a friend of mine, I asked him what interesting subject he thought a French-Canadian ecclesiastical university Rector might appropriately develop before a Texan audience. We both agreed that I would explain to you "What is *our* idea of a University?"

Of course, you have all heard of Cardinal Newman's famous book on the same question. Here is one of his very subtle quotations: "A University is not a birthplace of poets or authors, of founders of schools, leaders of colonies, or conquerors of nations. It does not promise a generation of Aristotles or Newtons, of Napoleons or Washingtons, of Raphaels or Shakespeares, though such miracles of nature it has before now contained within its precincts. Nor is it content on the other hand with forming the critic or the ex-

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perimentalist, the economist or the engineer, though such too it includes within its scope. But a University training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life. It is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them." A volume would scarcely suffice to comment on these lines so full of substance.

But Cardinal Newman wrote his book a hundred years ago and he had in mind an Irish University in Dublin. The case of a French University, if not different from a religious viewpoint, differs greatly in many other respects. Besides, I am sure that our own conception of university training, although you may judge it somewhat antiquated, will appeal to you as an important and sound achievement.

The task of education is a beautiful one. It is a work of art, it is a work of life. When a young man enrolls in a university, his education has previously been brought to a certain degree of efficiency. But there still remains much to be accomplished. Indeed, we have to put the finishing touch on the work of our predecessors, who have labored at the intellectual and moral formation of the student: we have to make a man of him, a *complete* man. In my mind, a complete man must be learned, philosophical, and religious. Even this is not sufficient. When we have taught a young man "how to think," there is something more we must teach him: we must teach him to be a *leader*. No Christian has the right to live

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for himself alone; he must live for others, be serviceable to his neighbor, enlighten him, protect him and be his benefactor.

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We are aware that there exists a certain feeling of uneasiness, of discontent rather, among university leaders of English-speaking America. They complain of the unpreparedness of the boys and girls enrolling in their faculties and of the exaggerated specialization of the students. I have heard the president of a New England university blankly acknowledge these two evils at a centennial celebration. Others believe that modern universities comprise too many professional schools or so-called faculties and that three or four of them—really fundamental ones—should suffice. This has been clearly written by a very clever president of one of your largest and wealthiest universities. Personally, I endorse the essential in these opinions.

In Quebec, our old system of education has shielded us from some of these reputed evils. A boy who wishes to become a clergyman, a physician, or a lawyer must, at the age of twelve, enter one of our thirty-two classical colleges—thirty-two for a population of 2,500,000—where he will follow an eight-year course of French and English (the two official languages of the country), Latin and Greek, history, geography, mathematics and sciences, philosophy and religion. The aim of this lengthy course is to train the mind of the young man and to give him a general culture, thoroughly disinterested, without specialization in any particular subject, quite unlike the English curriculum of high schools and arts course where optional subjects are customary. As a matter of fact, we consider such options premature and prejudicial to general training. Note two years of philosophi-

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cal studies which are the fit and necessary completion of the course of secondary teaching. And mind you, we do not understand philosophy as a mere perusal of all the philosophical doctrines known to the world; of course, we have to analyze them because they explain, because they are witnesses to the evolution of philosophical thought; but we do a great deal more: we inculcate in the student a method of thinking and a particular philosophical doctrine.

After this eight-year course, the qualified student obtains his B.A. degree. Now, he may be allowed to register in one of the leading faculties of the university (divinity, philosophy, medicine, dental surgery, law), and he is ready for specialization. I do not speak of our faculties of sciences, engineering, and higher commercial studies. Naturally, a B.A. degree is always an official matriculation in any of these departments, but other diplomas are accepted as well.

We are perfectly conscious that the traditional classical course takes a long time and that the average student will not get a livelihood before he is twenty-five. But we are so deeply convinced that this is the only adequate preparation for a university student that we will "stick to it," thus following the advice of many presidents of American universities who would, if they could, exact from matriculating students this safe and traditional standing. It is no easy task, I assure you, to maintain it even among our Latin-minded people, for every young man today is eager to *make money*. But, to hurry is a mistake and to build a house on a poor foundation would be of no avail.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, what is a university in our day? A seat of higher learning and research and professional training as well. The modern tendency leans towards the

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teaching of all human knowledge. University diplomas have become very popular in all classes of society. I dare say they are even a fetishism. Perhaps it is a compliment to the universities but it is also a troublesome problem. Some years ago, I received from a celebrated seat of learning a circular letter announcing courses on *City Traffic*. I entertain no doubt as to the importance of this particular knowledge for chauffeurs and policemen, but I wonder if it should enter the scope of a university?

From this standpoint, the European conception of a university differs from ours, if I am not mistaken. Let us take the University of Montreal, for example. We boast of seven faculties, twelve affiliated schools, and as many so-called *annexed* schools. European-minded, we would have preferred to retain the faculties only, with a few affiliated schools. But this was impossible. All sorts of diplomas being awarded throughout Canada and the United States for various kinds of special teaching, we had to do the same in order to enable our students to follow new careers. Inevitably, a reaction was doomed to occur. It was daringly voiced by the President of the University of Chicago and his words were commented on all over the continent.

I do not say that I agree with him on all points: some of them are too radical. The President of the University of Chicago may have changed his mind since he uttered his revolutionary plan of reform; nevertheless, this is what he said. In his opinion, a university should be composed uniquely of three faculties: metaphysics, social sciences, and natural sciences. He considers as mere professional training the teaching of theology, law, medicine, engineering, and commerce, and he sets it apart from the university proper with all the institutions of special researches.

Newman's idea that "University teaching without Theol-

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ogy is simply unphilosophical," is far from his mind. And that is one of the reasons why we do not agree with him on all points, in French Canada.

Another difficulty arises upon examining this new doctrine. Were it understood, first, that all elementary teaching of a given subject, even leading to the baccalaureate, is no part of university training, and second, that this elementary knowledge is sufficient for the practice of a given profession, we would be ready to admit the author's idea. But there are such things as doctorates and masteries of these branches of learning, and why would these degrees not pertain to university teaching?

Moreover, to me, scientific research which supposes a thorough knowledge of a particular science and a fair knowledge of others, is the very stamp of university work and it is also considered as such by a majority.

But there is a point in the author's argument where I join him heartily and without restriction: it is when he recognizes a leading rôle to philosophy in his new program. He speaks of metaphysics: I speak of philosophy as a whole. The aim of higher education is *wisdom*, does he say, and we all know that philosophy is *the* school of wisdom. Here I feel that we are touching the nucleus of this speech.

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In our opinion, the study of philosophy is not only a preparatory discipline for those who are attracted by higher learning, it is a necessary guidance in the attainment of this learning itself. The faculty of philosophy should act as a sort of compensation bureau or "clearing house" in the midst of the intermingling activities of all other faculties and schools. It is evident that a course of philosophy which would be a mere study of all intellectual errors and theories

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of men since the beginning of civilization, could not accomplish the mission we are advocating. Besides, we educationists consider it our duty to shield the young minds entrusted to us from dangerous intellectual experiences, to which their lack of maturity would surely expose them. Therefore, a doctrine, a system of thought is necessary: the Catholic universities have selected the philosophy of St. Thomas of Aquinas, which is, as you know, the philosophy of Aristotle, christianized, considerably augmented, and fully adapted to the needs of our day. This system is not purely ecclesiastical: it can be described as the "natural philosophy of the human mind."

There is a danger for many students, that of clinging to the *sensible* without ever rising to the *thinkable*. Philosophy will show them how this can be avoided. "The soul and life of university training lies in this process. A university is a laboratory of thought, the home of abstract science, pure theories, fundamental principles, rethought and examined in all the breadth of their spiritual dimensions: there, we can learn what is the hierarchy of essences, what is the being, unfolded in all its modalities and measured according to its limits generically, specifically and differentially."

I must apologize for so obscure a phraseology. But let me, once more, use this abstract language to give a few examples of the practical utility of philosophy. Without it, I cannot see how a student could judge of materialism, pragmatism, and phenomenism, for instance; of naturalism in pedagogics; in mathematics and physics, what could he think of Einstein's relativism and the theories of evolution; in psychology, what of determinism; in social economy, what of the new forms of Marxism; in political science, what of so many systems, fascists, or others?

Natural sciences become more and more popular amongst



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us. A sound philosophy will, above all, maintain in this particular realm the fundamental principle of finality as the formal bond of experience and the conducting wire of scientific thought, opposing to the so-called scientist the necessary existence of primary causes.

Science is privileged with complete autonomy in its methods and conclusions. But philosophy has the right to criticize science; and it is philosophy that points out to us the exact sense, the nature, and reach of laws and formulas.

To quote again Cardinal Villeneuve, Chancellor of Quebec University: "... the true University man is the one who does not simply possess a good knowledge and a fair culture in science and arts but who, moreover, knows their major principles. . . . Philosophy alone links the different teachings on a common ground and provides the root and strength of every science. In other words, philosophy alone gifts the thinker with intellectual power and transcendency, thus enabling him to consider the problems of truth as a *universalist*; philosophy alone creates the University mind apt to judge truth universally, and trains the genial specialist who finally conquers the élite. . . ."

Philosophy ranks first because it possesses the power to organize the different branches of human knowledge and to show the hierarchy in which they stand. But in our estimation, the noblest of all our Faculties is theology, whose object is God himself.

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"The supreme glory of a Catholic university and its sturdiest rampart against doctrinal error is to add to the gleam of natural lights the splendid rays which come from Above; to pursue its researches in the brightness of this double focus and to penetrate its teaching with the princi-

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ples of Divine Revelation. Then sacred theology, by its incomparable nobleness as well as by the absolute certainty of its object, surpasses all other knowledge. It associates the earthly man to the eternal science of God Himself."

I could continue on with this fine quotation, extracted from an after-dinner speech, delivered by a former chancellor of Quebec University, the late Cardinal Rouleau.

In Montreal, our faculty of theology has taken the means of propagating theological doctrines among laity and putting higher religious teaching within the reach of the man on the street. It has organized public classes on liturgy, canon law, Holy Scriptures, morals, Catholic action, and pontifical doctrine. The late Pope Pius XI has been, in recent years, the champion of Catholic action.

Catholic action is a lay move sponsored by ecclesiastical hierarchy; it tends towards a renovation of society under the impulse of a live faith and zeal. Its leaders require a thorough training and deep convictions; they will find them in the teachings of our new Institute.

The pontifical doctrine issued by the Vatican comes to us, as you know, by means of Encyclical Letters or similar official documents, such as the one on racial theories. It deals with dogmatical, moral, and social subjects. The four last Popes, Leo XIII and Pius XI, in particular, were very remarkable leaders. Their masterly writings have been honored with universal commentaries and admiration. The two letters known as "Rerum Novarum" and "Quadragesimo anno" constitute the charter of modern Catholic social doctrine. Well-informed and far-sighted, courageous and wise, clear and moderate, they show the way to the betterment of the economic and social world and to the healing of modern plagues. English-speaking non-Catholics who have read these letters, found in them statements and theses most

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comforting to their minds and hearts. It is the duty and happiness of French-Canadian universities to spread over the people of our Province and all over the country the benefits of so humane and urgent a doctrine.

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Universities are the brains of a nation; they cannot therefore remain indifferent to national problems.

In a country like ours, officially bilingual, whose history comprises two distinct parts—the French regime and the English regime—where two different traditions of religion, education, intellectual ideals meet together in all circumstances, I must say that the *national sense* is still in the making. Our national status has been defined only recently, during the Westminster Conference. Long ago, we were a colony—nobody remembers that nor cares to remember—we were a dominion from 1867 to 1926; now, we are a realm, an autonomous realm, with the King of England on the throne; a virtually independent realm which is a part of the British Commonwealth of nations. This new status involves certain privileges with which our people as a whole are not yet familiar—and it is no wonder, for old-fashioned imperialists have endeavored for years to minimize the reach of the Westminster agreement.

Besides, we French-Canadians who were in this new land one hundred and fifty years before the coming of the English, we who have built our homes on the shores of the St. Lawrence and all over Canada without any hope or temptation of ever returning to France, we hold that our culture, our laws and traditions, have the same rights as the English throughout the country, which rights have been officially recognized by the Act of British North America.

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It would not be safe to leave to political men alone the care of explaining and defending our national status. Too many strange influences blow in political spheres. These all-important questions must be studied and defined in the serene atmosphere of our universities which will thus become the strongholds of our national aspirations.

There too, particularly in our faculty of law, our international politics should be elaborated by men who are experts in the matter and whose disinterestedness is a guarantee of freedom. I will further say that many aspects of our political, economic, and educational life appearing on the program of our School of Social Science, are well protected against the interference of party spirit. All those who contemplate doing their share in social service, those who are attracted by journalism as a career or those whose ambition urges them to the mayoralty or deputation, should matriculate in our School. It is recognized that excellent laws, recently voted, have been inspired and even drafted by our professors.

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Of course, Ladies and Gentlemen, the French Universities of Quebec and Montreal, like others of the same universal type, have had from the beginning their faculties of law and medicine. Ours are more than sixty years old. To these were added in the course of time, arts, letters, pharmacy, dental surgery, engineering, commerce, and natural sciences. All these branches of learning are necessary to our growing youth and are taught nowhere else, in their mother-tongue, except in France. We were compelled to organize such schools and we do not regret having done so.

But it is obvious today that universities must specialize,

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at least to a certain extent. Besides, it is now impossible to compete, in certain fields, with neighboring universities, magnificently endowed and equipped with perfect laboratories and boasting of exceptional staffs of professors. The requirements are not exactly the same all over the country; therefore, universities have to select which of them must be fully answered to. If I understand well, this is what your institution has been doing for years, and it has become famous in the field of pure and applied science, with notable undertakings in letters and art.

What is our own position in Quebec and Montreal? We alone on the American continent teach all the subjects of university courses in French. Our faculty of letters comprises Greek, Latin, and English, but specializes in French and French-Canadian literature. Our faculty of law trains its pupils to apply the laws of the country which are twofold; the French regime laws which we have preserved, and the English laws brought to us in 1763. Our civil laws are French, and any one wishing to get familiar with them has a splendid opportunity to do so in Montreal. I have spoken lengthily of theology, philosophy, and social science: Montreal, Quebec, and Ottawa are the only three universities where the Catholic view in these all-important domains of thought can be secured. It is our aim steadily to develop the teaching of letters, law, social science, philosophy, and religious doctrine, in order to make of our universities Latin centers of culture on this Anglo-Saxon continent. Such was the mission our French-Canadian ancestors contemplated as early as 1770, when they attempted the foundation of the *Royal George College*, whose name alone remained. This mission is still our goal.

May I end this strange sermon by quoting an illustrious man who has drawn the charter of Catholic universities in a powerful document entitled "Deus scientiarum Dominus." On the occasion of the golden jubilee of the Catholic University of America, His Holiness Pius XI wrote words which can be listened to and understood by every Christian educationist worthy of the name. Here they are: "Through the University, it will be possible to bring to bear upon the most pressing problems of the day the full force of those principles of justice and charity in which alone they will find their solution. In the course of Our Pontificate, we have had occasion to treat these problems more than once in our Encyclical Letters; here We wish only to point out the solid basis upon which Our teaching rests. Since the sciences of civics, sociology, and economics deal with individual and collective human welfare, they cannot escape from the philosophical and religious implications of man's origin, nature, and destiny. If they ignore God, they can never hope to understand adequately the creature which He formed in His own image and likeness, and whom He sent His own Divine Son to redeem. Christian teaching alone, in its majestic integrity, can give full meaning and compelling motive to the demand for human rights and liberties because it alone gives worth and dignity to human personality. In consequence of his high conception of the nature and gifts of man, the Catholic is necessarily the champion of true human rights and the defender of true human liberties; it is in the name of God Himself that he cries out against any civic philosophy which would degrade man to the position of a soulless pawn in a sordid game of power and prestige, or would seek to banish him from membership in the human family; it is in the same Holy Name that he opposes any social philosophy which would regard man as a mere

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chattel in commercial competition for profit, or would set him at the throat of his fellows in a blind, brutish class struggle for existence."

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Let my last word be a wish of success and prosperity to the most distinguished and cultured President of this noble Institution; to the numerous and competent staff of professors who have greeted me so sympathetically; to the students so carefully selected and diligently trained, who compose the intellectual posterity of a great and far-sighted man, the founder of this University. God bless us all! And may His grace make of us *complete men*, I mean: learned, philosophical, and religious men! Amen.

OLIVIER MAURALT.